

SOCIALISM — GRADES 1, 2, & 3

I have been isolated from the Party for nearly seven years now, excepting for a brief visit to London in 1953. During that visit I attended many meetings addressed by Turner, and have had plenty of time to think about them since.

I have received very little news of the Party during the past eighteen months, but I gather that there has been very serious objection, on the part of members, to Turner's presentation of the Party case. Perhaps, therefore, the comments of an interested bystander will not be without interest.

There is a close analogy, in my opinion, between the Turner business, and the teaching of shorthand, as experienced by me some thirty years ago. This particular system of shorthand was taught in three grades. Grade 1 consisted merely of learning to write the characters that represented the various sounds, and of forming words with them. At the end of Grade 1, the student could say quite truthfully that he was writing shorthand, though his efforts were little speedier than ordinary handwriting.

Once Grade 1 was mastered, but not before, the student went on to Grades 2 and 3, which consisted of methods of abbreviating and streamlining what he learnt in Grade 1, so that, at the end, he was writing shorthand that could be developed to a speed of 120 words per minute, or faster. Grade 3 shorthand bore only a superficial resemblance to his efforts in Grade 1, but they were both undeniably shorthand, and the earlier stage had to be mastered before the higher could be understood.

It can be said that there are grades of Party membership, and it will help in understanding the Turner business, if this is accepted. If members will cast their minds back to the time of their first contact with the Party (excepting those who were born into it), they will remember that it was the

simple contrast between existing capitalism and the possibilities of socialism that first aroused their interest.

In my own case, the item that aroused my curiosity was the confident assertion that, under socialism, I would not need to work more than two or three hours a day, for about twenty years of my life, and in return I would get all that I wanted. Proof was forthcoming for this assertion, and it seemed a highly desirable alternative to the long hours, with insufficient return, characteristic of capitalism.

This was definitely a Grade 1 approach, but it was what was needed to sow the seeds of discontent with capitalism, and eventually bring me into the Party.

How does Turner deal with the question "What will it be like under socialism?" I have heard him inform such a questioner that, under socialism, he would not do any one job, and thus become known as a bricklayer, plumber, or lavatory attendant. He would do many jobs, and, because of the change in social relationships, he would enjoy them all.

As one who has had a good grounding in Grade 1, and who is not unfamiliar with the higher thoughts of Grades 2 and 3, that answer did not seem unreasonable to me. But I strongly doubt whether it did anything but bewilder the enquirer, who might well have concluded that the simplicities of capitalism were preferable to the holding of several jobs. He does not have to like his job under capitalism.

Since the Party analysis of capitalism is unique, it follows that the Party itself must instruct those who are interested, or who might become interested. It follows, therefore, that the approach to non-members, whether through meetings, pamphlets, or the "S.S.," must be the Grade 1 approach. For

without a good grounding in Grade 1, the ideas of Grades 2 and 3 will only mystify.

It is highly desirable that the ideas appropriate to Grades 2 and 3 should be expressed and discussed, since the Party would otherwise become static. But this should only be done at Branches, after business, at social gatherings of members; or in the Forum. From such discussions, only participated in by members who are well-grounded in Grade 1, much stimulation of the mind will result.

Incidentally, it might amuse members to classify the articles in FORUM for themselves. For example, there it little doubt that Comrade F. Evans' articles would be marked Grade 3, since many members, if not the majority, have some difficulty in following his arguments. His arguments would obviously be unsuitable for general dissemination—they would drive away rather than attract those hearing of the Party for the first time. Yet they are a valuable contribution to socialist thought.

In conclusion, I would ask Comrade Turner to cast his mind back to the days when he first heard of the Party, and ask himself whether he would have been influenced then by the platform arguments that he uses today. Apparently he thinks the D. of P. is out of date. He is possibly right, from a Grade 2 or 3 point of view. A member thoroughly grounded in Grade 1 does not have such desperate need of the sheet anchor provided by the D. of P. as does the enquirer or new member.

Meetings of members to discuss matters appropriate to Grades 2 and 3 might possibly decide that such matters as the class struggle should be played down in these times. If so, let them put it to a Party Meeting, and abide by the result.

J.O.B. (South Africa).

RELATIVE SURPLUS VALUE (2)

In the previous article I dealt a little cursorily with F. Evans' views on relative surplus value and capital accumulation. Unfortunately in that article there was an omission from a quote vide Professor Bowley which made the quote pointless. I had intended to deal with these matters in greater detail but I feel that before doing so, there are other assertions made by Evans which ought to be dealt with first.

To begin with, Evans holds that "War is the *ramrod* of progress for capitalism raising the tempo of capital's accumulation." Put plainly it means that capitalists plough back more surplus value in war-time for the enlargement of the productive apparatus, viz., machinery, plant, buildings, etc., than in "the peaceful era". This is simply not true of world capitalism in general and even less true of British capitalism in particular. The guilt of Evans' assumptions lies in the innocence of any data to sustain them.

So far from the tempo of capital accumulation increasing during the war in Britain, it sank to a very low level, and, U.S.A. capitalism, apart, this also was true of other belligerent powers. True capital accumulation did take place here but far from there being an overall net investment there were in the years 1944 and 1945, respectively, disinvestment to the tune of £968 million and £805 million. In other words there was an estimated decrease in publicly and privately owned capital assets of this amount due to inability to make good, depreciation of these assets.—("Investment in the United Kingdom 1938, 1944, 1945.")

So far from extending production via increased accumulation, British capitalists emerged from the war with a quarter of their existing capital destroyed. ("Census of Production, 1950.") Other losses suffered by them were £1,000 million foreign assets (a virtual destruction), external debts of £3,000 million, £700 million shipping losses and £500 million destruction on land. Incidentally, 4,000,000 houses were destroyed or damaged by 'enemy action.' (Perhaps a third of the total number.) Trade also declined catastrophically, British exports falling by more than two-thirds. High output was achieved in guns, tanks, aeroplanes, etc., but it must be remembered that 60 per cent of the workers and a great part of industrial equipment were transferred to war industries to the harm of other industries.

Seeing that the capitalist class pay for wars then the enormous war costs were a

drain on their assets and economic resources. This expenditure was veiled somewhat by living on borrowed time, i.e. by the floating of loans; that meant that for years after the war high taxation would operate. Had the cost of war been solely from current sources then it would have been obvious from the steepness of extent of taxation to see that so far from capitalists increasing their profits that the reverse was the case.

The wastage of capital assets and arrest of normal economic development was also true of the 1914-1918 War. According to "the Economic Section of the League of Nations 1933" the running down of industrial equipment and the physical devastation and economic dislocation caused by the first World War, production declined and even by 1923 it had made little or no advance over the European level of production of 1913. Even in Britain the pre-war level of production was not regained and passed until 1924. For Europe it took two years longer. Production of wheat in Europe was down after the 1914-18 War by 17 per cent. Coal production was down by 11 per cent and steel production down by 20 per cent. European production had hardly begun to go ahead when it was beaten back by the world crisis.

The task of British Capitalism at the end of the last war was—only to a much greater extent—the same as the 1914-18 war, the re-equipment of their economic resources. In short, to make good the losses sustained during the war. A task which Mr. Harrod the Conservative economist said "would ensure full employment for some years, no matter what government was in power."

There are other factors to consider, of course, in maintaining full employment but they must be left for another issue of FORUM.

What one can say is that there has been no sensational expansion of British capitalism since the war. Indeed there are not lacking a number of economists who say that recent investment of physical capital in Britain has been too small since the war. There are others who allege that investment has been insufficient to make good current wastage—as in the war years—the capital stock has continued to run down faster than it has been replaced. If so, then it would seem that British capitalism is living off its economic future.

Whatever may be the truth of this it can at least be said that the need to build up

the British export trade, especially where the metal and engineering industries are concerned, reveals why these industries and other basic trades have secured so small a share of capital investment funds.

According to the Industrial Supplement of the "Manchester Guardian," who base their evidence on estimates given by the Central Statistical Office, the British Economy is on the whole doing slightly more than keeping its capital assets intact. Although it adds "this does not mean that all industries are doing the same." This hardly squares with that profusion of use values due to the ever expanding production per media of surplus value which Evans sees as the outstanding feature of capitalism.

Another point re Evans' statement that "War speeds up with the national economy, the greater and more equal diffusion of use-value." It is true that vast numbers of use-values were produced, i.e. guns, rifles, tanks, etc. But these can hardly be the diffusion of use-values which brings greater economic equality between the classes. Such things do not form part of our standard of living whatever they contribute to the prospects of dying.

In actual fact the mass of use-values for consumption fell by 25 per cent during the war and according to G. D. N. Worswick "There was only a slight increase in aggregate consumption after the war from 1946 to 1950." The increase per head was even smaller being less than one per cent although the range of goods were wider. The level of consumption, or if you like, "the greater and more equal diffusion of use-value" seems to have been lower even five years after the war than before it.

In short, I think enough evidence has been given to show—and there is plenty more—that wars do not assist in the economic development of society which Evans confuses with progress. Rather it can be shown that war with its destruction of material wealth, its physical devastation and economic disorganisation, hampers economic development.

In following articles I propose to deal with Evans' assertions of a new industrial revolution based upon an atomic-powered plastic-moulded era and his curious assumption that capitalism is a constant process of cheapening commodities through the competition of capitals.

E.W.

IMPROVING THE SOCIALIST CASE

4—New Principles and Policy

Previous articles in this series have criticised the Declaration of Principles and have discussed the position of a socialist organisation. Finally we turn to the question of suggesting, in positive terms, the lines along which the propaganda and organisation of the S.P.G.B. may be expected to develop.

Fifty years ago the founders of the Party took over certain ideas from people like Marx, developing some of them and abandoning others. Today, some socialists claim to see implications in S.P.G.B. theory and consequences of S.P.G.B. organisation which were not realised by the members in 1904. We further think that the socialist position can be made stronger by stating it differently from the D. of P., and that certain features of Party organisation can be advantageously remodelled.

What are the terms in which a socialist organisation should present itself to people, seeking recognition and encouraging identification with its aims? These terms must be narrow enough to give some sort of definition to socialist ideas, yet wide enough not to exclude any socialist. It is not just a simple matter of classifying people into those who are socialists and those who are not. The process of becoming a socialist is gradual, and there is no rigid demarcation between those who are and those who are not. We need to know how to encourage people to identify themselves with the movement, either by joining or by active pursuit of socialist aims.

Since a socialist organisation is one seeking revolutionary change, it is necessary to state in general terms the character of the new society we desire and work for. Propositions about Socialism range all the way from certain basic and more or less permanent concepts like "production solely for use" and "free access", to the *peripheral* and comparatively unimportant guesses about such things as design of buildings and methods of travel. Obviously the organisation is mainly concerned with the more predictable and socially significant aspects. Some of these follow logically from the postulate of production solely for use—e.g. the new society must be world-wide, mass-understood, stateless and non-coercive. Such attributes might well be included in an

expanded and dynamically-conceived version of our present Object.

Emergent Socialism

Having stated the essentials of our object, we should then seek an adequate understanding of how it can be achieved. We are concerned with how the new society can be brought into being (one "establishes" a business or a fact, but hardly a whole new way of living). For convenience we separate two factors here—the spreading of socialist knowledge, and the requisite actions to be taken in the light of that knowledge. The Party has hitherto had two misconceptions about the change it seeks; it has supposed that the growth of socialist *ideas* will have no appreciable effect on the other aspects of society; and that the change from Capitalism to Socialism will take place as a sudden break.

I cannot here go into all the relevant arguments on these points, but will state an alternative positive theory. Socialism is emerging now. The growth of socialist ideas will be accompanied by the growth of institutions (social practices) in the direction of Socialism. Capitalism is preparing the way for this by developing (at first, doubtless, for purely capitalist reasons) the social forms, ideas, practices, attitudes, which, when universal and integrated, will be Socialism. "Free" access to libraries, health services, etc.—i.e. access on the basis of need, not money demand—is a part of Capitalism not typically or peculiarly capitalist in character. Such examples, insofar as they rest upon satisfaction according to need rather than size of pocket, illustrate the mode of access that people will enjoy to all things in socialist society. Similarly, although racial tension is increasing in many parts of the world today, the work of sociologists has resulted in wider acceptance of the ideas of one human race—and this is part of the socialist outlook. Socialism is thus seen as the expansion in all fields of social processes such as free access, and the development of social attitudes such as equality.

Let no one imagine that this is reformism. Reformism implies an isolated, fragmentary approach to social problems. It also implies rejection of only selected parts of Capitalism

and uncritical acceptance of the rest. Although we are not reformers, we do claim that the revolutionary movement need not exclude or repudiate every action and idea that emanates from those who are not avowed socialists. Accordingly, we should be prepared to recognise the value of ideas, as well as facts, coming from "outside" the movement, acknowledging acceptable ideas wherever we find them, as well as opposing hostile ones. This means looking at every field of human endeavour and appraising the progressive, socialism-developing tendencies to be encouraged and the reactionary, socialist-hindering tendencies to be opposed.

Basis of Organisation

Now let us consider an alternative basis of membership to the D. of P. or, rather, the basis of agreement upon which adherents (members or sympathisers) of our socialist organisation might come together. We are here much more concerned with *attitudes* than with the mere assertion of facts. Consequently the basic statements will aim to summarise the approach of socialists to the problems of the nature of society (history), its movement towards a new society, how the new society is to come, and how the activities of socialists accelerate its coming.

Properly speaking, people do not desire *objects*, but *actions* with regard to those objects. The "common ownership" of the Party's object and the "comfort, equality and freedom" of its D. of P. are essentially static concepts—what we really want is to work usefully and pleasantly, to enjoy free access to what we need, to co-operate, and so on. Our stated agreements could be along these lines:—

UNDERSTANDING that society is continuous and that change in ideas and institutions is one process.

DESIRING a way of life (Socialism) characterised by equalitarian, co-operative and harmonious social relationships.

RECOGNISING that developments of existing society are changing property and authoritarian institutions in a socialist direction.

ENCOURAGING the growth of socialist tendencies (ideas, actions and institutions) by word and deed.

Despite the difference from typical S.P.B.G. formulations, the above could scarcely be subscribed to by any except socialists. Some Party members will undoubtedly object to the idea that Socialism is evolving now, and to the omission of commitments to working-class identification, capture of political power, etc. The value placed upon these aspects of the existing Party case must be weighed against the opportunities (made possible by greater tolerance of diversity) for socialist ideas to develop, to enter new fields of thought and endeavour, and to play a part in every forward movement of society.

Abolishing Authoritarianism

Any change in the pattern of socialist ideas would be accompanied by corresponding organisational changes. Once socialists cease to regard themselves as adherents to a political party, they will not be content to retain the paraphernalia of politics—the rules borrowed from other organisations, the machinery for disciplining recalcitrant minorities, the Party line, the business attitude to propaganda (how many there? how much literature sold?), putting it to the vote, taking it to the E.C., etc., etc. This is not intended to rule out organisation in the sense of having a secretary to write letters, a treasurer to pay bills, or a committee to edit publications.

An authoritarian organisation works on the assumption that reason is not enough to keep its members loyal; it believes in discipline as a means of preserving unity. Yet our organisation has no need of rule if it can achieve subjective as well as objective harmony, a spontaneous unity of purpose. Once it has the courage to disband its machinery of discipline, it will find that there is no longer any "action detrimental" that rules could deal with.

In the early days of the Party there was much more talk of what was supposed to be incompatible with membership. Today it is being realised that only those attach themselves to the organisation who are interested in advancing its aims. If their interest is not maintained they go away. To expel them is unnecessary—and harmful because the machinery set up for this purpose becomes our concern instead of the theoretical differences which discussion alone can resolve.

A more open form of organisation would enable the content and methods of our propaganda to be changed where necessary. We could expect to have more contact with people who are close to our ideas, more discussions seeking to narrow differences, instead of preserving them by the "which Party . . ." formula of debate. The contents

of the Party case would be openly displayed—and if two views were found on a particular question there is always the possibility that each would be judged on its merits. Our written propaganda would also benefit by abolishing the distinction between propaganda and controversy, and by having one journal giving the general views of the S.P.G.B. instead of the present S.S. and FORUM. The editorials could act as the (majority) voice of the organisation; elsewhere writers would be restricted, in subject matter and presentation, only to secure interest of the readers.

In concluding this series of articles I wish to stress that they are the fruits of many discussions among members. What I have written is a particular expression of a more general trend of thought along the lines of:

Recognition that Socialism is the product of society, not of a class movement.

Dissatisfaction with the D. of P. as basis of membership.

Criticism of the Party's view of how Socialism will come.

Need for the welcoming of diversity of views among socialists and the seeking of reconciliation by reason, not discipline.

Organisational changes away from authoritarianism and imposed conformity.

S.R.P.

THE CASE FOR A WEEKLY SOCIALIST STANDARD

A CHURCH MAGAZINE!

Although the general standard of articles has improved considerably over the last couple of years, the style of format and general appearance of the *Socialist Standard* has not. It has been said by some members that the *Socialist Standard* resembles a Church magazine—and I think they have got something there! The type is uniform throughout, only to be broken up occasionally by the announcement of a meeting or lecture. The list of contents on the front page is a complete waste of space, unless the number of the page is given. Anyway, the size of both the heading of the first article and the list of contents is so small that no one could read them at a distance of about three feet. And the back page, with its various sizes and types of printing (for Branches and Groups), is an eye-sore.

No doubt other members have also got criticisms to make (if they read any other

journals, then they must have!); but my suggestion is—and I hope members will take it up—that an entirely new *Socialist NEWS-PAPER* be published by the Party.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A NEW SOCIALIST STANDARD

It has been argued by some members that the "Socialist Standard" looks more "intellectual" than such "left-wing" contemporaries as *The Socialist Leader*, *The Socialist Outlook* or *Freedom*; but this damns it right away. We want a paper that does not look "intellectual" like the *Statesman* or *Truth*; we want a paper that will appeal to the ordinary person, the "man in the street" who read the *News Chronicle*, *Reveille* or the *Greyhound Express* rather than the "arty-crafty" types who carry *The Times* or the *Statesman* under their arm.

A socialist journal should look more professional; less like a Church magazine; more like a daily newspaper—with large snappy headlines and with news items on trade union activities, strikes, elections, Communist Party purges, etc., throughout the world, written from the socialist angle—and *not* with the usual—“... and the only solution to working class problems is . . .” at the end of every item. The average article or news item should not be more than 1,000 words. The paper should *not* contain more than one or two “theoretical” articles on such subjects as the implications of socialism, rational thinking, the origins of the family, economics. All articles, including the theoretical or historical, should be written as simply as possible. A special column (or columns) should be set aside for book reviews, under the heading “New Books.” These reviews should be short—and not just left to one comrade, as occurs at present. There should be a column (probably vertical, as in the *Socialist Leader*) for press cuttings and extracts from Hansard. (This would take the place of the old Speaker’s Notes.)

A socialist newspaper should contain at least two cartoons (there are a few cartoonists in the S.P.G.B.), graphs—and photographs. Both the *Socialist Standard* and the *Western Socialist* have used cartoons in the past, and the *Western* has used graphs and photographs (once to illustrate the brutality of the American police).

The new *Standard* should encourage letters (not more than 750 words) from members, sympathisers and others. Those letters which are in agreement with the Party case should go in as they are, those not in line should be answered (in different type)—briefly! Regarding printing—type and headlines, they should be as varied in style and size as possible as this is easier on the eyes than the present uniformity in the *Socialist Standard*.

A newspaper should not, in my opinion, be too large. About 15" x 11½" would be reasonable. It should contain eight pages.

A LARGER STAFF

A new *Socialist Standard* would need a larger staff than the present Editorial Committee.

We have been told that we haven’t got enough writers in the Party, but this is just not true. At least FORUM has proved that. There are quite sufficient writers, who although, perhaps not capable of writing long theoretical articles (which in the main we don’t want), but who are quite capable of writing-up news items with a socialist slant. Those members who can specialise on trade unions, the Labour Party, the Communist Party, the Middle East, China, etc., should

form small committees and deal **exclusively** with these subjects when the need arises. These committees should meet at least once a week, regardless of whether there is any important news on their subjects, to exchange views, discuss new books and the like.

Members of the Companion Parties and the numerous isolated socialists throughout the world should be encouraged to act as our correspondents, as does Comrade Ron Everson of New Zealand. Instead of, say, receiving and printing a letter in the *Standard* from a comrade in Austria, we should encourage this and other comrades to send in short news items from their respective areas. We could have at least one correspondent in a dozen or so countries. We do not need the capitalist agencies such as B.U.P., A.P. or Reuters. Our correspondents need not be proficient writers, as long as they write legibly; their material could be typed-up if they have no typewriter.

No doubt other members have ideas for a socialist paper worthy of the S.P.G.B. If so, let’s have ‘em.

At the beginning of the article I said that many articles appearing in the present *Socialist Standard* were dated by the time they were read. This is inevitable with a monthly. But, why, after 50 years, have only a monthly? What about that weekly that has been talked about so much in the past?

A WEEKLY?

An organisation such as the S.P.G.B. should have a weekly newspaper. All other parties have, including the almost defunct I.L.P. If tiny groups of Anarchists and Trotskyists in this and other countries can produce weekly papers then I am sure we can—if we really wanted to. Can I hear some comrade say: “We can’t afford it”? But we can easily afford a weekly if (a) we increase the sale at least 10,000 copies, and (b) accept advertisements. No doubt some “purists” in the Party will argue that accepting advertisements is against socialist principles. But surely we must fight capitalism by any methods. So long as the advertisers do not try and dictate policy to us we should take their money. After all we are not just opposed to certain capitalist concerns, but to the system. Yes, adverts can, to a certain extent, help us run a decent newspaper. The more the better. If we still needed more money we should have a “Fighting Fund” as we have had in the *Standard* in the past. We could set up a monthly target, and prominently publish the progress each week (shades of Barbara Niven?).

The circulation of a weekly socialist newspaper could easily be raised to 10,000 copies a week by distribution through agents, and

by members; not in twos and threes but in hundreds, selling it outside stations, at street corners on Saturdays (it should come out every Friday) and at opponents’ meetings. If Communists and Fascists can do it for their organisations (despite the prejudice against them) then we should be prepared to do it for ours. But I can’t imagine large numbers of members getting enthusiastic about selling the present *Socialist Standard* at railway stations, etc.

A weekly socialist paper should be *primarily* for non-members. The FORUM (which could, perhaps, be published every other month) would be *primarily*, but not exclusively, for members.

So comrades, between now and next Conference, let’s get down to work on starting a weekly S.P.G.B. newspaper that looks worthy of the Party. Something that all of us can be proud of. We have talked long enough, now let’s do something.

PETER E. NEWELL.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Comrades,

There has recently appeared in FORUM a series of articles by E.W. under the title “Notes on Crises.” The first article only clears the ground, but in the second an attempt begins to be made to “formulate a number of general propositions which have a crucial bearing on the emergence of crises,” and to contest the under-consumption theory in particular.

The first general proposition is that “any acute disappointment with regard to profit expectation will have a decisive bearing on curtailment of investment and hence production” and “such a state of affairs will have a marked disequilibrating effect.”

The second and third articles are mainly concerned with embroidering and elaborating on this theme. Right at the end of the third article, however, we are told that “There are other factors bound up with the emergence of crises, i.e., existing wage levels, the extent of unemployment and its influence as a competitive force on the labour market, also the extent to which new sources of cheap labour can be tapped. These will be dealt with later.

Finally, of the general propositions in respect of the cause of crises, there are the two most important which have not yet been mentioned, ‘the anarchy of production’ and and ‘the disproportionality of production’.

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HISTORICAL MATERIALISM AND MODERN TIMES

Until recently a very brief statement of the M.C.H. would have been an adequate introduction to this subject. In fact in previous contributions this writer took it to be common ground, and therefore made no reference to it. However, from recent issues of FORUM this appears to be far from true. In fact it appears that we have nearly as many variants as we have members, or at least contributors.

In a recent contribution (December '54) P. J. McHale (Birmingham) explains that the mode of production (not the method or technique of production) is basic in the following way.

"The correct answer, often given by Engels, is as follows:—

"There are no causes which are not also effects, no effects which are not causes. An integrated philosophy must contain arguments in a circle, for everything turns back to itself. We may commence our argument from any part of the circle, in short, make ANY part of our circle our starting point, our THEORETICAL basis. Socialists choose the mode of production as a THEORETICAL basis because it lends itself best to scientific examination." (page 91).

It would be useful, if he would now state, at least one place, where Engels stated this categorically.

However Engels has written as follows:—

"The determining element in history is ULTIMATELY the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If, therefore, somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the ONLY determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase."—Letter to Bloch, 1890.

"What we understand by the economic conditions which we regard as the determining basis of the history of society are the methods by which human beings in a given society produce their means of subsistence and exchange the products among themselves (insofar as division of labour exists). Thus the ENTIRE TECHNIQUE of production and transport is here included. According to our conception this technique also determines the method of exchange and, further, the division of products and with it, after the dissolution of tribal society, the division into

classes also and hence the relations of lordship and servitude and with them the state, politics, law, etc."—Letter to Starkenburg, 1894.

"The economic situation in the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure political forms . . . theories, religious ideas . . . also exercise their influence . . . determining their FORM. . . . Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history one chose would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree."—Also in the letter to Bloch.

"So it is not, as people try here and there conveniently to imagine, that the economic position produces an automatic effect. Men make history themselves, only in given surroundings which condition it and on the basis of actual relations already existing, among which the economic relations, however much they may be influenced by the other political and ideological ones, are still ultimately the decisive ones, forming the red thread which runs through them and alone leads to understanding."—Also in the letter to Starkenburg.

ELECTRICITY

It is the purpose of this contribution to show how one major, new technique, which may be summarised in the word electricity, has produced changes in society, since the death of Marx, most of which were summarised very neatly by Optimus (FORUM, December '54) as changes in (1) The organisation of production, (2) the methods of production, (3) types of ownership, (4) access to what is produced, (5) types of investment and (6) social attitudes.

It is important to realise this relation and not to jump hastily to the conclusion that these changes are the socialist revolution. Though this is not to deny, in the words of Marx, that they may be the new relations maturing in the womb of the old society. However the relation is studied here in order to obtain a better understanding of present society.

The writer also holds the view that the M.C.H. is a theory which provides us with a method for understanding the evolution of

society, and that does not mean, just the dim and distant past. The theory needs to be applied to the 20th century seriously, not in the crabbed and limited way that it is toyed with in the Socialist Standard. When analysing new problems we must not be bound with stultifying notions that nothing new ever happens. Every fresh integration is in some sense novel. Similarly no scientist could ever make serious contributions to knowledge in a field where all his conclusions must agree with the answers given before the investigation. We criticise capitalist organisations that employ scientists to make proofs of propositions that they (the capitalists) want to think is true. That is bad when they do it. It is not science. It is bad when we do it too. As Marx pointed out, at the start of any scientific analysis it is necessary that "all mistrust must be abandoned and here must perish every craven thought." We must approach with knowledge and ability to analyse, but we must follow the argument with an open mind.

If we find that the M.C.H. does not help us to understand the world we live in, we should discard it and search for something that does. That is the only satisfactory approach. The writer does not take the view that it is of no help to us, but considers it an admirable tool with which to analyse modern society. In fact, he would go farther and say that it is the basis (or at any rate the best summary) of socialist knowledge. It is more fundamental than the D. of P. We could do worse than replace the D. of P. by a concise statement of historical materialism.

Since its formation the S.P.G.B. has found itself occupied with a series of obvious current problems, which can be called political and economic in the narrow sense of each term. Some of the main problems were the painfully, obvious poverty and inequalities of the early 20th century, World War and nationalism, the growing reform movement of the Liberal and Labour Parties, the world economic crisis, the rise of Fascism, World War II and the majority Labour Government. These problems of the day were each in turn shown, by a Marxist analysis, to be but subsidiary problems, for the working class, and that the basic cause of the evils associated with these topics, was to be found in the structure of society. We

have spread this understanding as much as we were able, but by concentrating on those aspects of society which were political or reformist in character, the basic analysis of the development of society, provided by the M.C.H. has slipped into the background, or at least has remained in the background. We have tended in this way to concern ourselves more with effects, and less with causes, than was desirable. (Even though we have done this less than any other political

party.) Now with the rather sudden occurrence of a political vacuum, we have the opportunity, and more important, the necessity, to reconsider and apply our basic theory to the evolution of society.

The part of the story that this writer has to tell is a pleasant one. Electricity has brought light and cleanliness to the factories and homes, radio, T.V. and cinema for our enjoyment, and calculation and experiment to replace authoritarianism in our daily life.

We shall start by considering the work of a historian and scholar, who drew attention some 20 years ago, to some of the changes in society that had occurred by that time, and who pointed out the importance of the use of electricity. We shall not follow this scholar, Lewis Mumford, slavishly, but will devote the next section to a short, critical survey of his contributions to this subject in the book, "Technics and Civilisation".

ROBERT.



CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE D. of P.

Some members have stated that they either don't know anyone who disagrees with the D. of P. and Object, or hardly anyone. I disagree with some parts of the D. of P. and I know many members who are of the same opinion. I am putting my disagreement in writing, as I wish members to at least discuss my ideas, with a view to changing theirs—or mine.

I agree with the object of our organisation but I don't know about the 'democratic control.' I don't really know what it means and I have a suspicion that most members are in the same boat. Democracy means to me, a state of affairs where all people have equality of access to what society produces; where mankind as well as satisfying its every need in the food- clothing- shelter- entertainment sense also has access to all the information and knowledge of society. I am sure though that that is not what is meant by democratic control. I can only visualise control on behalf of somebody as opposed to somebody else. Socialism as I see it, is a society where people have taken co-operation of its logical conclusion; have worked out where things are wanted, in what quantities and are satisfying those wants. How one can reconcile control with this I don't know, except in the sense of seeing that things are going from one place to another where they are needed.

PARLIAMENT

I think that the founder members were thinking of Parliament (the State) when they postulated democratic control. If this is so, we should hasten to remove this part of our D. of P. as it is not in line with our object. Parliament—the state machinery—exists to conserve the rights of a ruling class; to defend its interests both here and abroad; to maintain the status quo.

With Nos. 1 and 2 I have no quarrel, they only state facts.

CAPITALISTS

My disagreement with No. 3 is the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class. This implies that only workers have problems, that the capitalists are free now! To free the working class you also have to free the capitalist class for they are as tightly bound together as warden-convict, policemen-thief, employer-employee, buyer-seller. To get rid of one, you must get rid of the other. Capitalists as well as workers are affected by the anomalies of this system. They are not directly affected by poverty, but there is the threat that if they are not forever on their mettle they might be relegated to the ranks of the workers. (Marx's Wage Labour and Capital, touches on this.) In times of slump when numbers of workers are unemployed, the above position is accentuated, the smaller capitalists are obviously perturbed. Cessation of production or distribution can in many cases mean change of status—from capitalist to worker. Particularly is this the case of the capitalist who produces or distributes on the home market. Obviously the fears and struggles of this system belong to both classes and the only way to get rid of them and the other problems is to abolish classes and this can only be done by changing people's ideas.

No. 4 seems to me to be a contradiction in terms. If as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, how can it possibly set free the rest of mankind, when the rest of mankind are already free? I leave such tortuous questions to you comrades who wish to uphold the D. of P. as it stands. For my part I would explain the position simply by saying that socialism means the abolition of all classes.

It follows from statements above that I disagree with No. 5. Society will abolish classes when the ideas of society have changed enough to establish socialism. To accept No. 5 means that under no circumstances must we accept capitalists into our organisation or the help of capitalists. Further, any capitalists in the party should be expelled and any working class members who manage to evolve themselves to capitalist status should also be expelled. These are some of the implications of No. 5!

I oppose No. 6 as it stands. How one can convert the state machine with all its coercive aspects from an instrument of oppression into an agent of emancipation I don't know. My mind boggles at the thought. Emancipated Hydrogen and Cobalt bombs! When I joined the party I discussed No. 6 and was told (by members) that we would not take power. It is supposed that when we (S.P.G.B.) achieved power, we would abolish the state machinery. Of course this is nonsense, nobody ever captured power to abolish it. No. 6 states categorically that we are going to convert the machinery of government from an instrument of oppression to the agent of emancipation. Note, not abolish it. In other words we will still have government. (Shades of Carmell!). It would be pertinent to ask on whose behalf the government would be—for remember comrades—you can only have governors if there are governed. Which sounds suspiciously like capitalism to me.

POLITICS

These things will disappear when the ideological structure that supports them has disappeared. In other words when the ideas of another system of society have taken the place of the ideas of this one, then and then only will the institutions of capitalism

have been abolished. My contention is, that politics is the business of running or aspiring to run capitalism, and that all parties that achieve power are bound to run capitalism, despite their original aims. We should, therefore, withdraw from power-politics and state that we are a socialist organisation trying to change people's ideas, with the object of changing this society.

VIOLENCE

The ideas of violence which seem to be so prevalent in the party are also bound up with No. 6 and electoral activity. It dates back to the inception of the party. The ideas then in vogue (and still held) that socialism could be established in the face of a large minority or even a small minority, are fallacious. Socialism is a system where the accent is on complete co-operation; where, as people have free access there can be no coercion, and it could not possibly run or be established if there were a minority opposing. When we think of a minority, we think (like the founder members) of an organised minority and in the case of the founder members and many members now, a hostile minority, prepared to use violence. The main reason for their retention of No. 6 is that they visualise an active, hostile minority who are prepared to sabotage the efforts of a socialist majority and they want to use the state machinery to quell such a minority. Again these views are fallacious. A minority (obviously organised) can only exist today because it has the approval, the acceptance of society—tacit or otherwise. What many members seem to forget are the implications of social production, that the efforts of society are a cohesive whole. No minority could exist today without the approval of society. A minority today that wishes to participate in violent activities is dependent on society for its violent means. Bullets, Bayonets, Bombs and Battleships are only produced by society, not minorities, and as the socialist ideas of the majority will not allow the production of such things, there can be no violent minorities.

SOCIALISTS

I am opposed to No. 7 for reasons already roughly outlined. Regarding the platitude that the interests of the two classes are opposed; one can't disagree with a fact. I disagree with the implication that we are a working class party. We are not, or should not be. We are (or should be) a socialist party and as such full of socialists! Not worker socialists or capitalist socialists—but socialists. We cannot take sides in the class struggle as socialists. We can only recognise that there is a class struggle. To do more as socialists is to come down on one side or the

other, the implication being that one side has nothing to gain from socialism. I don't accept the hostility clause. I can't be hostile towards other organisations; though I do oppose their policies. I can only hate or be hostile in a personal sense.

I disagree with No. 8 for reasons largely given above. I am opposed to the S.P. pretending to participate in politics. I think that the job of bringing about socialism is the task of the whole of humanity, not just the working class.

JON KEYS.

Correspondence and articles should be sent to FORUM, S.P.G.B., 52 Clapham High Street, London, S.W.4. Subscriptions : 12 months, 7/6d., 6 months, 3/9d. Cheques and P.O.'s should be made payable to : E. Lake, S.P.G.B.

NEXT MONTH

Special Pre-conference Statement

**Members who have
been re-examining
the party's principles
and policy give their
conclusions**

CORRESPONDENCE

(continued from page 117)

Without relating all that has been said to these two fundamental features of capitalism, an adequate understanding of crises is impossible. In fact, one can go so far as to say that, whatever the type of crisis that emerges, it can be shown to be, in one way or other, an aspect of disproportionality."

In the fourth article, these latter two points are dealt with. Here are two typical statements from it. (1) "Entrepreneurs do not meet beforehand to regulate and harmonise productive conditions; what happens is that each capitalist or group of capitalists carry out investment decisions without regard to and in ignorance of other capitalists, and consequently they each have an imperfect knowledge of the market for which they are producing. Thus any errors in their calculations can only be revised after the event, i.e. through changes in price levels revealed by the market which are themselves the result of a break in the productive equilibrium." (2) "Given, then, the planlessness of capitalist production, with its inherent bias towards disproportionality, it can be said that when this uneven rate of expansion of the different branches of industry reaches a certain level, the possibility of a crisis emerges."

And in the fifth article, we get this:—"Because each concern in the making of capital goods will seek to expand as rapidly as possible in order to realise maximum profit earnings, regardless of what other concerns are doing, it will not be able to effectively gauge to what extent its own expansion and the expansion of others are contributing to raising to ever higher levels the expenses of production, and so narrowing the gap between production costs and realisation price. Indeed, the gap may be so narrow as to bring about an acute disappointment on the part of the entrepreneur in his profit expectation." And so we come full circle, back to where we started, after about 7,000 words.

It is curious that in all this there is no mention of the Soviet bloc of countries. Does E.W. believe that there is no possibility of crises occurring in these countries? None of his causes of crises operate in those countries, and yet he would obviously maintain that they are capitalist in character. From reading his arguments, it would appear that State planning, particularly in a relatively self-sufficient country or group of countries (such as the Soviet bloc) is sufficient to abolish crises. Is this what he means? I think he should make his position clear.

Yours fraternally,

J. C. ROWAN.